

Indigenous Peoples Statement Mercury INC-1, Stockholm, Sweden – June 7, 2010

By Island Sustainability Alliance Cook Islands (ISACI), International Indian Treaty Council, California Indian Environmental Alliance, and Inuit Circumpolar Council

Thank you Mr Chairman . We also would like to thank Sweden for their hospitality and warm welcome.

The Indigenous organizations present at this INC1 represent Indigenous Peoples from the circumpolar Arctic, Northern Regions, the Caribbean, the Pacific regions and North, Central and South America.

We want to bring special attention to the importance of this treaty to Indigenous Peoples, who rely to a great extent on a traditional diet for sustenance and ceremonial practices which is now threatened by mercury contamination. This threat comes from various sources that may be global or local. Global sources such as atmospheric mercury emissions travel from distant places to reach our pristine locations, contaminating our food sources. Local sources such as mining extract natural resources and leave a toxic legacy that permeates the air, land, water, and the food on which our Peoples' rely.

Mercury is a very real and urgent threat to our People's food security, our quality of life our cultural integrity and is a threat to our very existence as Peoples. Due to the well-known impacts of mercury to the environment and human health, including effects on learning and development, we are concerned that this negatively affects our future generations' ability to maintain our languages, songs and oral traditions.

Indigenous Peoples have a deep connection with the environment in a way that depends on and is reciprocal with the ecosystems around us. Traditional foods are not only important for our subsistence and health, but also for our current and continued social, cultural and spiritual well-being. Additionally, many Indigenous Peoples live in remote places where alternative food sources are scarce, and where food insecurity is common. Avoiding our traditional foods is not an acceptable option and is a clear violation of our human rights including; our right to food; rights to our means of subsistence; rights of the child and right to health as recognized by existing UN mechanisms, treaties and agreements.

Therefore, we stress the importance of recognizing and applying existing international human rights standards in these negotiations such as the U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples adopted by the U.N. General Assembly in 2007; the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 1 in Common, which states in part "... in no case may a people be deprived of its own means of subsistence.", and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, article 24, which recognizes the right of children and takes into consideration the risks of environmental pollution.

Although Indigenous Peoples are particularly vulnerable, we share with you the recognition that this is a global threat which affects not only the future generations of Indigenous peoples, but all peoples.

We would like to remind the distinguished delegates that Indigenous Peoples around the world suffer from the consequences of mercury contamination often without having any role in the origin of this problem, and without the ability to change it on our own.

You, however, can make a difference. We trust that you will do everything possible to achieve a strong and effective legally binding instrument on mercury that ensures compliance for the protection of our health and that of the planet, and we are looking forward to successful negotiations.

Thank you.